

CUBA:

Total Recall

Whether ranting publicly about the U.S. or reminiscing privately about his sheltered youth, Fidel Castro is a consistently long-winded speaker. That, it seems, is also his main problem as an author. Even so, Castro's autobiography is expected to become a world best seller—if his publisher can persuade him to keep it to less than encyclopedic length.

As is often true of politicians, it was Castro himself who decided that the world needed an account of his life. In 1962, a Cuban journalist passing through Milan mentioned to Italian publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli (who won world fame by bringing out Boris Pasternak's "Doctor Zhivago") the fact that Castro had already dashed off 1,300 pages of typewritten notes on his development as a revolutionary. Quickly adding the bearded Premier to his list of writers, Feltrinelli offered options (at almost \$5,000 a reading) to non-Italian publishers and signed up New York's Atheneum, London's Heinemann, Paris's Hachette, and other prestigious houses.

But getting the 1,300 pages down to a tidy length—Feltrinelli arbitrarily decided on 750 pages—proved a formidable task. Feltrinelli himself journeyed to Havana to help out, and soon the tall, mustached publisher and Castro found themselves working over a tape recorder at odd hours ranging from 11 a.m., when Castro was in pajamas, to 3 a.m., when he interrupted governmental consultations for a spot of creative work.

Talking without pause for the 60-minute length of the tapes, Castro described his youthful friends and his Jesuit teachers, whose rigid views on sexual morality still loom large in his consciousness. He traced the development of his political thinking and recounted his early revolutionary experience, including his role in the bloody 1948 riots in Bogotá when a bevy of the hemisphere's most distinguished statesmen—among them Secretary of State George Marshall—were amazed to find themselves under leftist gunfire.

'Get Out': Castro also told how, in 1959, when an agrarian reform committee visited the family ranch, his mother, then 70, appeared on horseback armed with a rifle and shouted: "Get out of my hacienda or I'll shoot." (Only after an appeal in person by Raúl Castro, Fidel's younger brother, did she agree to move to a Havana apartment and let her land be redistributed.)

The dictation séances took place in Castro's Havana apartment, which was crammed with books on agriculture, livestock, and irrigation. While Castro talked, purebred Leghorn chickens wandered through the house, leaving proof



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Castro, Feltrinelli (right), aide—and Leghorn chickens all around

of their passage behind them. "I supervise these chickens personally to see how many eggs a day they lay," Castro explained. Then he added: "If it were at all possible, I would also have a cow on my terrace."

Despite such interruptions, the memoirs progressed rapidly, and in due course Feltrinelli returned to Milan. But last week, the 37-year-old publisher was getting set to go back to Havana, for it seems that Castro has been stricken with a fresh attack of total recall and is threatening to spew forth still another 700 pages of reminiscences.